

# Mrs. Dutton and Mrs. Pine

By Juliet Wilbor Tompkins.

Some Really Human Characters Are Presented While the Reader Is Permitted to Consider the Question Whether Good Cooking and Housekeeping Are After All the Prime Essentials of the Happy and Contented Household.

**M**RS. DUTTON had worked for various people before she came to Gloria Penrose, for ladies had treated her civilly and respected her leisure and appreciated her abilities—but then their own homes, and sooner or later this had always meant friction with the powerful and indulged in such services as maid-servant, housekeeper, cook, and maid.

Gloria, after three days of amazed wonder if it were not too good to be true, had uttered an internal shout of joy and signed a check book full of blank checks.

"There! I'll give you another when that is used up," she explained. "Run the place your own way, but as if you were poor, you know. Poor but nice. Bring me my lunch on a tray and the day never let anything come near me before 4 o'clock."

And, shutting the door of the studio, she had modeled a fountain that took the Oscar Reed prize at the spring exhibition and founded the steady prosperity of the past eight years.

When friends bewailed their household difficulties, Gloria said with blithe cruelty, "Get a Mrs. Dutton!" She said it one night at a Sunday supper table and the man opposite looked up with a quick smile.

"Ah, get a Mrs. Pine!" he said.

The topic hung pleasantly between them the rest of the meal. The minute they rose from the table Jim Lawrence was at Gloria's side.

"You tell me about Mrs. Dutton and I'll tell you about Mrs. Dutton," she said instantly.

So they turned to a couch at the far end of the great studio and he told her about the fine woman who had managed his home and brought up his two sons. Little by little cooking and cleaning with a giant ease, yet insisting on table manners and small refinements that a man overlooks, keeping always her place, but so dignifying it that big boys now in college were not a shade less devoted to their Piney.

"She is like your next-door neighbor in a New England village," he explained. "A lady by refinement, yet simple, so that it doesn't embarrass you to have her in the kitchen. Good plain education, strong on morals and spelling—"

"Pols," Gloria interpreted.

"Exactly." A robust short-cut always gave him a laugh at himself. "Her only flaw is that she can't work with any one else and—so—"

"Neither can Mrs. Dutton," Gloria put in, and they laughed over it, even louder than before. "And once, when I had a strained knee, the feed between them was so bitter that I had to get well at once."

"Oh, I should never dare bring a nurse into the house with Piney," he admitted. "When Bobbs had scarlet fever she consented to get in a cook while she did the nursing, but she took care that it was a rather poor cook! She has the jolliest laugh in the world. When the boys and Piney get laughing together it's rather nice," he confided.

She understood with a curious pang a little like homesickness.

"Mrs. Dutton doesn't mother me. She owns and exhibits me," she thought it out. "I am her career. And she has really made wives to whom successful men point—they owe it all to her."

"Is she folks' too?" He was genuinely interested in Mrs. Dutton.

"Oh, no. Oh, never." The idea made Gloria laugh. She had another short cut for him. "She isn't friendly, you know—she's Napoleon. She never laughs. She has such a well-bred voice that when she says 'The wash has went, Miss Penrose,' you think she is being humorous."

Frank O'Brien then came up and wanted to know what was so amusing them.

"Let me in on it," he begged.

Gloria turned to him likingly and Jim Lawrence's heart missed a beat, but she did not tell.

"Oh, domestic life," she generalized. "Frank, do your collar story for Mr. Lawrence—the one about the—"

Frank did his Chinese act and Gloria laughed the way she listened—with all her heart and soul—and Jim Lawrence thought him a deadly bore.

Lawrence left at the first pause and Gloria, who had wanted to show him Mrs. Dutton, went home absurdly grieved.

For a week work lagged and a gentle melancholy lay on the face of life. In her leadings pursuit of the escaping day Gloria had seldom paused to look at herself and now, checked for a sober stare, she was dismayed at what she saw.

"I'm a mess," she said solemnly. "My work isn't developing—substituting a duck for a turtle isn't good—I don't have time for thinking—I'm just having a good time. A nice child of thirty-six!" She poked disinterestedly at the pillar of clay that was waiting to blossom into the fat, naughty, riotous baby of her public's delight.

"I'm a failure. I'm a—" Then she took a lump of clay and began to mold her trouble into a tiny group—the flesh and the spirit.

It was the beginning of her new manner, but of course she did not know that at the time.

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THE spring academy was holding its private view that afternoon, and Gloria's latest fountain—with the duck would be on exhibition. Mrs. Dutton came to remind her at 4 o'clock. Mrs. Dutton sat at the front door to let her out and to cast a competent look over her handwork.

"There is dinner for three, Miss Penrose, but not for four," she said.

"Three, but not for four," Gloria repeated with vague docility, then woke to understanding with a hasty, "Oh, I'm not going to bring home any one tonight. I don't feel like company."

"I can handle three," Mrs. Dutton repeated. But chops cannot be stretched. And when there is dessert for three and six is brought home at the last minute, no one is satisfied.

"It isn't fair to you, Mrs. Dutton," Gloria agreed, warmly. "Only you always work such miracles that I get to imposing on you. I won't get to night."

The elevator bore her off, and Mrs. Dutton, savoring the rich reward that was her daily fare, passed slowly through the apartment to see

what further miracles she could accomplish.

Gloria's fountain had been rimmed with grass and tulips, and the glorious baby in the middle held his usual audience of touched women. A thrill of the old pleasure stirred in Gloria's drooping heart; the thing did have life, charm, humor. Then a warm contralto voice drew her attention.

"Isn't he the cutest little kite?" It was saying. A big woman in rich black silk of an ancient cut, her white head bonneted with black velvet and pincers, white ruches at her neck and wrists, was smiling on the fountain.

Her handsome, rustic face glowed with a kind of tenderness.

"Don't he remind you of Bobbs?" the hearty voice went on. "He was just such a little rascal. Remember—"

A shift in the crowd revealed her companion standing at the pool's edge, listening with amused detachment. Jim Lawrence's eyes, fixed on the fountain, were not critical or sharp, but merely thoughtful; yet Gloria shrank away as though from jeers. Her cheeks burned white she stood blindly in front of a cord, black brook that had been flowing between banks of violet-snow at every academy exhibition since she could remember.

He led the way through the rooms to a bench whence Gloria and Frank O'Brien worshipped what was only a pile of peaches to the crowd, but was to them a little miracle in the laying on of paint.

Gloria's quick rising to meet Mrs. Pine seemed to leave O'Brien out of it, and when Lawrence turned to escort Mrs. Pine to the door, Gloria's direct, "You will come back for me here?" eliminated poor Frank forever. They were scarcely aware that he excused himself.

When the crowd thinned, they exchanged their bench for a taxi with no consciousness of interruption. Mrs. Dutton's perfect little dinner passed in the same absorbed exploration. Every miraculous moment turned up some fresh charm or value in one or the other.

Mrs. Dutton served them at first with a stately stiffness, then with a gradual relaxing of thoughtful consideration of Lawrence's pleasant person.

By dessert she had an air of brisk interest, and when she carried their coffee to the studio fire, she took a survey of the apartment as though canvassing for a possible extra room. She undoubtedly planned the wedding breakfast before she slept.

Gloria stood for good night, her hands in both of Jim Lawrence's.

"We're mad," she stammered. "Perfectly crazy. Life isn't like this. It won't be true in the morning."

"I'll come and find out," he said.

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THERE was never a moment when it was not true—gloriously, singingly true. Gloria was working furiously, and Jim Lawrence looked on with an arrested stillness, as though a revelation were at hand. And then one day he took a sheet of paper and drew a plan.

He had told her about his queer little house down in an old corner of the city, as he had told her about Bobbs and Chris and the series of critical articles he was writing on modern painters. But this plan brought a secret smile that presently drew him to her side.

"What is it?" she demanded.

"The studio we are going to build in my back yard," he said, and pointed out its many charms.

Gloria listened with a troubled brow. "Why, I hadn't thought about moving," she said slowly.

He was only amused. "You have thought about marrying me, haven't you?"

"Oh, yes. Daily. But somehow—I suppose I took it for granted that you would come here."

"With two boys and Mrs. Pine?" He was still smiling. "Come down and see my funny little house. You will like it."

"I know. This apartment doesn't matter. But Jim,"—her voice faltered—"We're very old."

He fought against understanding. "Well, Piney will have to submit to some help, with a lady in the house," he said, sketching the studio's fireplace.

A heavy silence crushed his brave lightness.

"Do you see Mrs. Dutton helping Mrs. Pine?" Gloria asked at last.

He took refuge in authority. "My good Gloria, they have to make some concessions to our lives!"

"Yes, but will they?" She spoke drearily. "And it isn't just that I

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"Three old Dutch peasants drinking tea can be so beautiful," she said regretfully. Then she looked back with amazement and candor. "I don't believe I could find one much harder than Mrs. Pine."

"It's worth trying, then?"

"Oh, I should say so; very well worth it."

Lawrence straightened up as though he threw off half a dozen years. And then he patiently took them on again, for Frank O'Brien clove the crowd, bearing gladly down on Gloria.

Lawrence excused himself to hunt up Mrs. Pine and followed blindly where she led, answering her comments with a jerky vagueness that presently brought a mischievous smile into the kink of face.

"I know, I've taken in all I can," he said very soon. "I know that means for a cliff, but it looks to me for all the world like a fine three-rib roast with the outside slice cut off for Bobbs. I guess I better go home."

"You must meet Miss Penrose first, the lady who made the fountain," Lawrence said suddenly.

A shift in the crowd revealed her companion standing at the pool's edge, listening with amused detachment. Jim Lawrence's eyes, fixed on the fountain, were not critical or sharp, but merely thoughtful; yet Gloria shrank away as though from jeers. Her cheeks burned white she stood blindly in front of a cord, black brook that had been flowing between banks of violet-snow at every academy exhibition since she could remember.

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